

60p

THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

The real King Arthur
UFOs and the Antichrist
Disappearances explained
Howl of the banshee
Mass phantoms

68



Aus & NZ \$1.75 SA R1.75 IR 85p US \$1.50

THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Published weekly by Orbis Publishing Limited
Orbis House, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

Volume 6 Issue 68

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In next week's issue

We unveil the true facts about the story of David Lang who 'vanished' before his family, and the mystery that vanished altogether when studied by researchers – see our series **Disappearances**. The first of a compelling series about the **Man in the iron mask** begins with an investigation into the identity of the mysterious prisoner. In **Hypnosis**, we sum up the work of Colonel Albert de Rochas, who hypnotised subjects who described lives they had yet to live. Historical references to the mystical meaning of numbers can be traced back to the time of Plato – find out more in **Numbers**. Lastly, **Demonic UFOs** presents a chilling vision of Armageddon and looks at claims that people are being brainwashed by 'satanic beings' who will bring about the end of the world.

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Subscription Rates

For six months (26 issues) £17.60, for one year (52 issues) £35.20. Send your order and remittance to The Unexplained Subscriptions, Punch Subscription Services, Watling Street, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK2 2BW, being sure to state the number of the first issue required.

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Malta: Binders are obtainable by ordering from your local newsagent price £3.25. In case of difficulty write to The Unexplained Binders, W.H. Smith–Continental Ltd, Po Box 272, 18a Scots Street, Valletta.

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Old soldiers never die

Phantoms are not always the lonely beings of the traditional ghost story; sometimes they appear in large numbers, re-enacting old battles. JOAN FORMAN relates some incidents in which phantoms appeared *en masse*

THE BATTLE OF NASEBY, in Northamptonshire, England, was fought on 14 June 1645. One of the major engagements of the English Civil War, it ended in the rout of the Royalist forces by the Parliamentary armies. But it seems to have been fought not once, but repeatedly – to have been ‘replayed’ annually for about a century afterwards. Local villagers would congregate on a nearby hill to witness the re-enactment of the fight. The watchers heard cannonfire and saw men fighting and falling, banners flying and cavalry charging; they even heard the screams and groans of the wounded. Yet all this was enacted in the sky above the battlefield.

We are accustomed to think of ghosts as single apparitions, appearing one at a time to one or two observers. But some records exist of large-scale hauntings – of phantoms appearing *en masse*, engaged in collective

An army sleeps on the eve of battle, while phantom warfare rages in the skies above. The apparition may be an anticipation of the bloodshed to come, or a re-enactment of some past engagement. Stories of ‘armies in the sky’ seen over battlefields are numerous – suggesting that the strenuous exertion and intense emotion of combat are somehow favourable to psychic phenomena

activity. They are often refighting some historic battle, as in the case above.

Another important engagement of the Civil War, the battle of Marston Moor, near York, is re-enacted from time to time, according to a local legend. The most favourable weather for the occurrence of the apparition is said to be fog, even though the original battle of 1645 was fought in midsummer.

Yet another Civil War battle fought over again by phantoms was the battle of Edgehill (1642). Only a few days after the battle, there were reports of apparitions of soldiers, cavalry and phantom scenery – all appearing in the sky over the battlefield. King Charles sent a number of army officers from Oxford to the site – and they witnessed the events, swearing statements to that effect (see page 496).

I experienced the terror and suffering of a long-past battle myself, when travelling in Scotland some years ago. I had chosen to stay in Selkirk, both because it is a good centre for touring and because I was interested in the career of James Graham, the first Marquis of





movement and, in spite of heroic charges by the Royalist leader and his cavalry, had slowly driven them back until they were pinned beneath the mass of Minchmoor.

At this point in the narrative, I looked out over the edge of the Newark courtyard and without warning was engulfed in a feeling of frantic misery and desperation. There was a sensation of turmoil, of many people struggling to escape and being forced back – not against the far side of the valley but right underneath the walls of the castle itself. I stood there for a few minutes, but the sense of furious and desperate fighting was unbearable. I moved away.

As I did so, I said that I believed Montrose's men had been massacred on this side of the valley and not on the other. My guide shook his head. 'Oh, no,' he said, 'I'm sure you're wrong. It is acknowledged that they died on the farther side.' I did not pursue the matter.

Then, as we walked away from that miserable place above the escarpment, I was

Montrose. This great cavalier leader had been Charles I's chief supporter in Scotland – his Captain-General. He had fought the Covenanting forces, which sided with the English Parliament. He had spectacular gifts as a soldier, and in 1645 led his armies in some brilliant forced marches across the mountains to achieve equally extraordinary victories over the King's enemies.

But towards the end of that year Montrose found that his luck began to run out. In attempting to lead his small army away from a much larger force of the enemy, led by General David Leslie, Montrose headed for Philiphaugh, a small plateau near Selkirk, where the Glen of Yarrow meets that of Ettrick, and camped there.

But Leslie was almost upon them. Leslie's army of 6000 men fell on Montrose's force of 700. The Royalists were driven from one end of the valley to the other before they were pinned in and cut down. The *annus mirabilis* of Montrose ended in the massacre of his men.

Local tradition has it that the Royalists were pinned down on the side of the valley that lies beneath Minchmoor. On the opposite side of the valley lay a castle known as Newark, perched on an escarpment above the battlefield. It was also said that, although General Leslie offered quarter to those Royalists who surrendered, many of the men and their camp followers were slaughtered after the battle.

I already knew of the battle, but not its exact details, and so I was glad when a knowledgeable Selkirk historian offered to guide me around the site. We found the ruins of the old Newark keep, isolated in its wild and beautiful valley, and entered the remains of the old courtyard. My guide began to describe the battle to me: how Leslie had caught Montrose's small force in a pincer



Top: a crucial battle of the English Civil War is marked by this monument at Naseby, Northamptonshire. Local people saw phantom re-enactments of it during the following 100 years

Above: Oliver Cromwell at the battle of Marston Moor, in Yorkshire. Apparitions of this battle are alleged to occur even today

Right: James Graham, first Marquis of Montrose, led a small Royalist force that was massacred at Philiphaugh, Scotland. Over 300 years later, the terror of the event was apparently experienced by the author while visiting the site



again immersed in a wave of terror and anguish, now coming from the courtyard itself. This time the feeling of fear and wretched despair were overwhelming: for a few seconds I was unable to move. The air seemed filled with cries of anguish, though I knew I was hearing nothing with the ear.

'It's here,' I said. 'They killed them here in this very courtyard. Where I am standing, and over there by the wall. They must have executed a whole lot of people in this very place.'

The Selkirk man was silent, visibly upset. Finally he said: 'There were people killed later, I think. Leslie went back on his promise; some of the non-combatants – women and boys – were killed, and afterwards some of the men. But I don't think that it was here.'

I said no more, but the misery of the place was heavy and I was glad to go from it.

The kindly historian telephoned the following day and said that the curious episode had so impressed him that he had further investigated the local records. 'It seems you may be right and tradition wrong,' he said. 'There's a contemporary record that refers to the castle side of the valley as being the scene of the final massacre, and that would make it right under the place where we stood. What's more, there seems to be some justification for thinking executions did take place in the castle bailey after the battle.'

Some of my ancestors belonged to the Graham clan and may have fought at Philiphaugh with their chief, Graham of Montrose. Could this fact have helped to make me a particularly sensitive 'receiver' for this strange experience?

Sounds of clashing metal

A further example of 'participation' in a past battle occurred in Windsor in the early 1970s. A house owned by Mr and Mrs Wakefield-Smith was apparently haunted by a man in a dark cloak, and they felt the atmosphere of the place to be unhappy. The garden, however, proved to be an equally interesting site. On one occasion when the owners had walked to the end of it, they suddenly seemed to be in an area of great heat and noise. Both husband and wife felt they were in the middle of a battle, for all around them were the sounds of clashing metal, like swords striking armour. There was a sensation of frenzied activity on all sides. Yet as suddenly as it began the phenomenon ended, and the garden was its usual tranquil self.

Although the Wakefield-Smiths' description of the ghosts suggests the Civil War period, the only battle referred to by local tradition was of a much earlier date, and was fought between Romans and Britons. It seems likely that this is what the couple encountered.

The great heat associated with the occurrence is interesting. Hauntings are generally associated with a fall in temperature, and this did indeed accompany the appearances of the



Above: Newark Castle, seen across the valley that was the scene of James Graham's defeat. The conventional opinion of historians is that Graham's men were trapped on the opposite side of the valley – behind the camera's viewpoint. But the author's experience while visiting the castle – apparently a 'replay' of the emotions of the battle – convinced her that the battle ended beneath the castle walls



Left: the keep of Newark Castle, from the courtyard. Here the author experienced, for the second time, the sensation of being engulfed in the anguish of many people. Her belief that the massacre that followed the battle had taken place in the courtyard proved to be supported by independent historical evidence – as did her intuition about the battle itself

ghost in the house. Was the experience of the battle a haunting, then, or some quite different phenomenon?

Not all large-scale manifestations relate to battles. The night-time activity seen by Dr and Mrs White in 1969 on the Isle of Wight did not seem to have anything to do with war (see page 274). Miss Edith Olivier, a Wiltshire author, was involved in a similar event during the First World War. She was driving towards the great Avebury Ring of standing stones as dusk was falling. As she came within sight of the circle she saw what she thought was an entire fair erected around and among the stones; she could hear music and see the lights of the booths. But as she drew level she found that the circle was empty, and there was no sound but that of the wind sighing among the great monoliths. Later Miss Olivier's enquiries revealed that fairs had been held at this spot in the past, but it had been at least 50 years since the last.

Frequently, communities that have lived

by an inflexible timetable reappear regularly in apparitional form for many years after their earthly disappearance. Thus groups of monks and nuns, accustomed to process and attend prayer at set times of the day and night, may be seen and heard repeating the same pattern centuries later. Such stories are numerous throughout Britain. At Hinxworth Place, near Baldock in Hertfordshire, processions of monks have been seen to come through a wall, apparently on their way to or from their worship through a doorway long bricked up.

Occasionally an entire church congregation is seen, as at Dallington, Northamptonshire, in 1907. Two schoolgirls visited a country church at the end of a walk. One, a local girl, entered the church first but came out again in a great hurry. Her companion, a visitor to the area, was intrigued and went into the building. The place seemed full of kneeling people, though they appeared, she afterwards said, 'to be made of a substance similar to soap bubbles'. There seem to be no other reports of similar apparitions at this site, and there is no indication of the period to which the ghostly worshippers belonged.

Yet another instance of a group apparition was reported from Wiltshire, where a detachment of Roman soldiers was said to march along the old road beyond Oldbury Camp. A shepherd who sighted the band on one occasion gave this description of them: 'Men with beards, wearing skirts and big helmets with hair on the top. And a girl bird on a pole a' front on 'em.' A fair, if somewhat rustic, description of a Roman column, carrying its eagle insignia at its head.

Soldiers, in small groups or whole armies, in war or peace, seem to supply the bulk of



Above: Hinxworth Place, in Hertfordshire, is one of the many places in England where a ghostly religious ritual is said to occur: a procession of monks appears through a wall

Below: a typically English church, at Dallington, in Northamptonshire. The ghostly congregation seen briefly in 1907 was more insubstantial – seemingly made of 'soap bubbles'



mass-phantom phenomena. One of the most interesting cases is that of Major A. D. McDonagh, an officer serving in the Indian Army on the North-West Frontier.

On one occasion the Major rode along a range of hills close to the River Indus. He eventually reached a ridge from which he could see across a wide horseshoe-shaped valley, which was heavily wooded. As he gazed down onto it, he abruptly found himself in a large group of soldiers, apparently from ancient Greek times, busy with the usual duties of a military encampment. He saw three altars, and noticed a group of men beyond them, at the head of the valley, gathered around some object. McDonagh could not see what was holding their attention until he walked across. Then he perceived a dressed stone slab with a newly cut inscription. The language was Greek, of which in ordinary life he had no knowledge. However, he found himself able to read and understand what was written here: the inscription seemed to relate to the death of one of the generals of Alexander the Great. He felt, too, a marked sensation of sorrow among the men with whom he stood.

Evidence in stone

Abruptly, the experience ended. Major McDonagh found himself back on the ridge, looking down into the valley, vividly aware of what he had just experienced.

Later he returned with Indian labourers to explore the area thoroughly. He found the place heavily overgrown with jungle vegetation and the men had to hack their way through to the head of the valley in which he had seen the inscribed rock. When eventually they reached it and cleared away the vegetation, they found a partially dressed rock surface with some traces of Greek lettering upon it, though the inscription was



Left: Oldbury Camp, an Iron Age earthwork in Wiltshire, apparently occupied by the Romans when they subdued Britain. A detachment of Roman soldiers is said still to march along the line of the old Roman road nearby

Below: Alexander the Great, (in a crown) before a Hindu idol, following his crossing of the Indus river in 326 BC. The painting is from a 15th-century Persian manuscript. A British officer, Major McDonagh, who had been riding near the river, suddenly found himself in the midst of this army. For an extended period he watched the men, apparently in mourning for one of their generals

badly eroded and defaced. McDonagh had no doubt, however, that this was the memorial he had seen earlier. The valley proved to be the site of one of the camps of Alexander before he forded the Indus in 326 BC.

This account is a particularly interesting example of a mass-phantom appearance. The distance in time between the original episode and its modern 'repeat' was over 2000 years – an exceptional period in these cases. Furthermore, the subject of the experience participated in the events he witnessed – moving around to get a view of the things he wanted to see, and finding himself able to understand a language normally unknown to him.

The idea of reincarnation suggests itself in cases like these. Was Major McDonagh a soldier in Alexander's army in some former life? Or did he merely 'pick up' the sensations of the troop who had stood by the rock with its inscription to the dead general?

Occurrences of this nature are too rare to provide much evidence. However, appearances of phantoms *en masse* are not. There are at least two possible explanations of these. They may involve the *reproduction* of the sights and sounds of the original event – possibly because information stored by the physical surroundings is, in favourable conditions, 'retransmitted' to create the impression in the minds of certain specially sensitive witnesses that they are actually observing the original events. Alternatively, they may be true timeslips, in which past and present, or present and future, coexist temporarily. However, this process too might be triggered by the mind of the witness, interacting with information registered by the physical surroundings.

In the stress of battle the barriers of time can apparently be breached. Further remarkable cases are presented on page 1390



Who was the real King Arthur?

King Arthur's legendary exploits have all the trappings of complete fiction – but there is some evidence to show that there actually was a great British leader called Arthur who led his people to an unforgettable victory.

PAUL BEGG examines the evidence

MERLIN THE MAGICIAN, the powerful sword Excalibur, the young Arthur fated to become not just king, but mystical hero of a 'once and future' Britain, the gallantry of the knights of the Round Table, and the Sun setting over the mysterious Isle of Avalon where the dying Arthur drifts in a gilded boat . . . The elements of the greatest British legend merge in the collective unconsciousness until the story of King Arthur seems no more than a vivid dream. Yet, as many modern researchers have discovered, it seems likely that there really was an historical Arthur. But who was he?

He was most certainly *not* a medieval knight, although his popular image today owes almost everything to that era. Yet such evidence as there is points to his having been a warrior chieftain active in the century after the collapse of Roman Britain.

It was a deeply disturbing time for the Britons. By 410 they had enjoyed nearly 400 years of unprecedented prosperity as part of the great Roman Empire, benefiting from its strong central government, the protection of a trained and efficient army and the delights of a hitherto undreamed-of civilisation. But by the late fourth century the power of Rome had begun to weaken and by 410 Emperor Honorius had enough trouble containing threats to Rome itself. He told the Britons to look to their own defences, no doubt intending that this should be only a temporary measure. As it turned out, Britain was never to belong to Rome again.

With the relatively sudden retreat of *pax romana* the British Isles became once again prey to uprisings of small bands of warring tribesmen, led by local despots. However, in 425 a dictator called Vortigern managed to assume absolute power, ruthlessly putting down any opposition and hiring an army of Anglo-Saxon mercenaries led by two continental soldiers of fortune named Hengist and Horsa. But in 455 the mercenaries rebelled and riots spread throughout the country. Vortigern's regime collapsed.

To add to the ensuing chaos, the foreign mercenaries now began attacking their former British allies. In the face of a national threat the British rallied under the banner of an enigmatic figure about whom we know little, Ambrosius Aurelianus. But about the



Arthur and a list of his conquered kingdoms, from Peter of Langtoft's *Chronicle of England* (c.1300). On his shield Arthur carries a representation of the Virgin and child, symbol of his exalted Christian ideals. The 30 kingdoms named here were never remotely connected with the historical Arthur, but Peter of Langtoft was less concerned with the truth than with creating a British hero comparable to Charlemagne

year 500 the British victories culminated in the great battle of Badon, which was said to be decisive enough to ensure peace in the land for 50 years afterwards. The hero who brought about this momentous victory was called Arthur.

Yet almost everything we know of the historical Arthur is derived from just three documents written either by his near contemporaries or in the succeeding 200 years. These documents exist today only in medieval copies – of copies.

Of course repeated copying has its pitfalls, especially when the text is written in an inflected language such as Latin, where one slip in transcription can totally alter the meaning. Besides, there is the possibility of missing out whole chunks of text or giving in to the temptation to embellish the stories – a

common medieval failing. By the 10th century Arthur had become a folk hero about whom there was a complex collection of stories – most of which were fictitious. It seems likely that the scribe, seeing an obscure or cryptic reference to Arthur (or to somebody he thought was Arthur), could have added spurious information to what is otherwise an historically accurate document.

Badon and after

The earliest Arthurian document is the *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* ('Concerning the ruin and conquest of Britain'), written by a monk named Gildas some time after the battle of Badon and possibly during Arthur's lifetime. It is not a formal history, but more a diatribe directed at five contemporary kings whose sinful ways Gildas believed would bring destruction to the nation in the same way as disaster had been brought by the godless and ineffectual rulers of the past. To illustrate his point, Gildas recorded the very worst features of British history, often twisting fact beyond recognition to suit his purposes.

Gildas, frugal with the names of people and places, says of the Britons under the leadership of Ambrosius:

... by God's aid, victory came to them. From that time forth, sometimes the Britons were victorious, sometimes the enemy, up to the year of the siege of Mount Badon, which was almost the last but not the least slaughter of the gallows-crew [the Saxons].

Gildas does not tell us much, but the fact that he mentions Badon – a British victory – in a book designed to illustrate the failings of, and defeats suffered by, the Britons points to the reality of the event and suggests that it was too fresh in the nation's memory for him to attempt to misrepresent it.

The *Annales Cambriae* ('Welsh annals') are a set of Easter annals – a device used by the monks to help with the complicated task of dating Easter, which is a movable feast – primarily concerned with Welsh affairs. The



Top: the Romans leave Britain in AD 410. Soon after their departure, Britain became prey to incursions by the Saxons. In this perilous time a warrior called Arthur arose – whose name, over 1500 years later, is still synonymous with victory over the invaders

Above: the Roman Emperor Honorius, whose decision it was to abandon Britain

Left: the death of the Saxon leader Hengist and the destruction of his army by Arthur at Badon. This victory was so conclusive that it was followed by 50 years of peace



pages of the Easter Annals had a wide margin in which it was the custom to make a brief entry of important events against the appropriate year (their dates are, however, unreliable). Of Arthur they say:

c.518 Battle of Badon in which Arthur carried the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ on his shoulders for three days and three nights and the Britons were victors.

The old Welsh word *scuid* ('shoulder') is very similar to *scuit* ('shield'). This entry probably means that Arthur carried a representation of the cross on his shield and that the battle raged for three days. This possible error in transcription indicates that the scribe was probably copying from an early Welsh source now lost. Another entry reads: 'c.539 the strife of Camlann in which Arthur and Mordred perished. And there was a plague in Britain and Ireland.'

The third Arthurian document is the *Historia Britonnum* ('History of the Britons'), which used to be ascribed to a monk named Nennius. It exists today as a medieval copy of the original, which was written in about the year 850. The entry that mentions Arthur by name reads:

In that time the Saxons strengthened in multitude and grew in Britain. On the death of Hengist, however, Octha, his son, passed from the northern part of Britain to the region of the Cantii [Kent] and from him arise the kings of the Cantii.

Then Arthur fought against them in those days [there follows a list of 12

Right: a medieval illustration of Merlin building Stonehenge

Below: the enigmatic monoliths of the stone circles of Stonehenge, Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire



A monument to Merlin

Stonehenge is rarely, if ever, associated with the Arthurian legends, and strictly speaking it is not an Arthurian site. But in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, Merlin is credited with bringing the stones from Ireland by sea and erecting them on Salisbury Plain as a memorial to the Britons who died fighting the Saxons. Three elements of this story are essentially correct: the so-called blue-stones are of 'foreign' origin; they were transported to Salisbury Plain by water, and Stonehenge was used as a burial site.

The outer ring of Stonehenge is made up of sarsen stones – 'sarsen' being defined as 'a boulder carried by ice in a glacial period' and possibly derived from *Saracen*, originally a name for the Muslim people of Arabia, but used later by Europeans to describe Muslims in general.

Interestingly, the Matter of Britain connects the Saracens with the 'city of Sarras'. It was to this semi-mythical place that Galahad was entrusted to take the Holy Grail; but Sarras is identified in the Arthurian legends as 'Jerusalem' – a Jerusalem that is in Britain.

battles] and in all battles he was victor. It is to be assumed that Arthur fought against the Cantii and Octha, but the separate paragraphs may suggest that these were different campaigns. Hengist's son was called Oisc (or Aesc) and he became king in 488. He died in 512 and was succeeded by his son, Octha. If Nennius really means that Arthur fought against Octha, the approximate date of 518 given in the *Annales Cambriae* for the battle of Badon could be correct.

To these documents we can add the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a remarkable document that purports to describe events from the Anglo-Saxon point of view and, as might therefore be expected, does not mention the British hero Arthur or his triumph at Badon. But strangely it also fails to record a significant Saxon victory between 514 and 552.

Many lengthy and complicated arguments have raged over the content of these documents, but in the final analysis it has to be admitted that, although Badon has been reasonably well-established as an historical event, there is no good reason other than tradition to link Arthur with it. So who was this Arthur around whom the legends grew?

One theory is that Arthur was an insignificant warrior fighting on the Scottish borders who was plucked from obscurity by the Britons when they needed the psychological boost of a national hero. Some of the

An illustrated page from an anonymous 15th-century *Chronicle of England*, showing a fictitious Arthur bearing his heraldic shield



battles reputedly fought by Arthur have, it is true, been located in the Border areas, but this does not explain why the legend has become so strongly linked with Wales and the West Country.

Another possibility is that the significance of Badon became apparent only 50 years later, when the Anglo-Saxons ruled Britain and the defeated Britons had been driven into Wales, Cornwall and Brittany. There they dreamed of a man who would one day lead them to final, glorious victory over their Saxon oppressors. Arthur, victor of Badon, was the prime candidate for this timeless hero.

A third reason for the lack of information about the real Arthur is suggested by references to him in several saints' *Lives*. Historically unreliable, taken as a whole they give a curiously coherent picture of Arthur that is quite different from our expectations.

The *Life of St Cadoc* (composed around the year 1100) portrays Arthur as lustful and perverse. The *Life of St Padern* speaks contemptuously of 'a certain tyrannus [tyrant] named Arthur'. The *Life of St Gildas* describes Arthur as a tyrannus and as a *Rex Rebells* (a revolutionary – by implication an upstart).

It seems that the Church entertained a long and deeply rooted hostility towards Arthur that remained strong even in the 12th

century when elsewhere he was regarded as a hero. But would such enmity have been accorded an insignificant chieftain on the Scottish borders or an obscure guerilla fighter in the West Country? It seems improbable. Arthur must have been an influential person to have earned such persistent hostility, yet he has never been accused of being in any way opposed to Christianity. So what did he do? We shall probably never know, but it seems likely that, since history was written by clerics and Arthur had offended the Church, he became the victim of ecclesiastical censorship.

Then in 1191 there occurred at Glastonbury an event that has become one of the most contentious issues in Arthurian scholarship: the exhumation of Arthur. He had long been associated with Glastonbury, which in his day was ringed by marshes – effectively making it an island. We are told that the Welsh called Glastonbury *Ynys Avallon*, meaning ‘Isle of Apples’, and it was to ‘Avalon’ that Arthur was taken, mortally wounded, after the battle of Camlann.

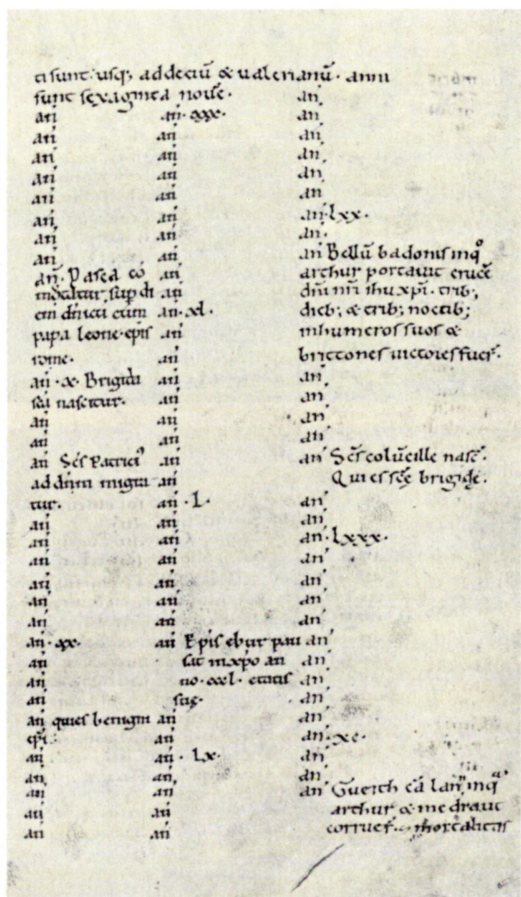
We have four accounts of the exhumation of Arthur. They differ in details but agree on two points: Arthur’s grave was found between two stone pyramids – a detailed history of Glastonbury written between 1129 and 1139 by William Malmesbury tells us that these were in fact standing crosses in the ancient cemetery south of the Lady Chapel – and that in or beneath the ‘coffin’ there was a cross inscribed with the words: HIC IACET

Right: the archaeologist Dr Ralegh Radford who excavated the traditional site of Arthur’s grave at Glastonbury Abbey in 1962. He is indicating the site of the exhumation made in 1191 by the monks – but was the grave they uncovered that of Arthur?



Above: the cross, now lost, that was said to mark Arthur and Guinevere’s grave at Glastonbury

Left: a page from an early 11th-century manuscript of the *Annales Cambriae* (‘Welsh Annals’). The right-hand column records the battle of Badon and the left-hand one ends with the death of Arthur and Mordred at the battle of Camlann



Further reading

Leslie Alcock, *Arthur's Britain*, Penguin 1971
 Geoffrey Ashe (ed.), *The quest for Arthur's Britain*, Paladin 1971
 John Darrah, *The real Camelot*, Thames & Hudson 1981
 Beram Saklatvala, *Arthur: Roman Britain's last champion*, David & Charles 1967



SEPULTUS INCLITUS REX ARTHURUS CUM WENNEVERIA UXORE SUA SECUNDA IN INSULA AVALLONIS (Here lies the famous King Arthur, with Guinevere his second wife, buried in the Isle of Avalon).

The cross can be traced down to the 18th century, when it was known to be in the nearby town of Wells, but it subsequently disappeared. A reproduction contained in the sixth edition of Camden’s *Britannia* may be an accurate representation of the original; if so, an epigraphic dating of the lettering shows that the cross is not of the sixth century, when Arthur died, nor of the 12th century, when the grave was exhumed, but of the 10th century.

We know that in the 10th century Bishop Dunstan raised the level of the cemetery and enclosed it with a wall. It is therefore possible that Arthur’s grave was found during the process of this work and the memorial erected above the grave removed, the lead cross being placed in the grave as identification.

In 1962 archaeologists excavated the area where Arthur’s grave was said to be located and they found evidence of a pit from which a stone memorial could have been removed, and a large hole that had been dug out and refilled at some time between 1180 and 1191. This evidence is almost concrete proof that the monks of Glastonbury did exhume someone’s grave in 1191. But was it the grave of Arthur?

The general opinion is that the monks perpetrated a hoax. Several motives have been suggested for their having done so, but none of the motives actually precludes the possibility that the grave really was Arthur’s.

Whether Arthur existed or not will probably remain a mystery, but belief in his existence has created a potent image that transcends mere history: the fascination with the Arthurian legend will remain, and his memory will endure.

Out of the Celtic twilight

The wailing of the banshee to announce death is a well-known part of Irish folklore. But, as FRANK SMYTH discovers, recent cases have shown that this sad mourner is very much alive – and not only in Ireland

ONE NIGHT EARLY in 1979 Irene McCormack of Andover, Hampshire, England, was lying in bed when she heard what she later described as 'the most awful wailing noise'. She was alone in the house at the time and was in a melancholy mood, for her mother was close to death in Winchester Hospital.

When she heard the wailing she nearly fell out of bed. 'I got up, shaking, and went downstairs; the dog was running round and round the living room, whimpering.' He would not settle, so Mrs McCormack took him upstairs to the bedroom where, after the wailing had died away, they both lay waiting for daybreak.

With the dawn came a police message for Mrs McCormack: she was to go to the bedside of her mother. When she arrived at the hospital she found her mother in a coma; she stayed with her until her mother died a short time later. When the funeral was over and the household had returned to normal, Mrs McCormack told her husband and children what she had heard. Although she is not Irish, her husband is: he suggested that she had heard the banshee.

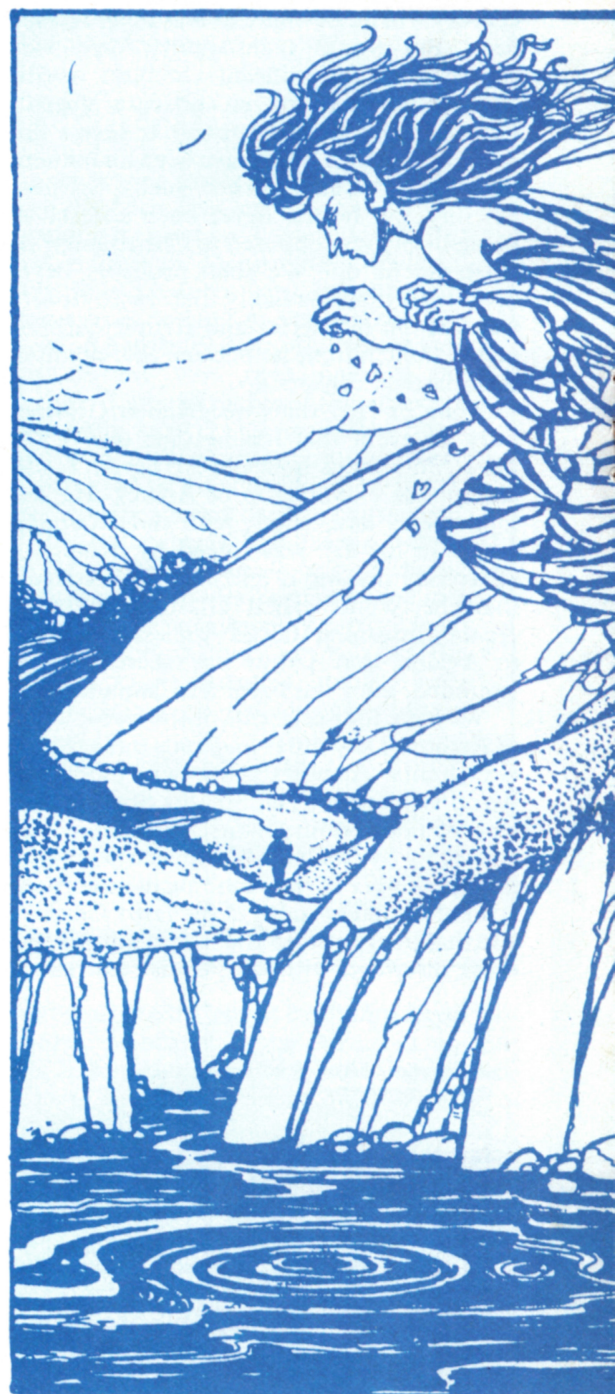
'Many of my family laughed at this,' says Mrs McCormack in a letter to *The Unexplained*. 'They probably thought I was going mad . . . but I hope never to hear anything like that again.'

Pronounced as it is spelt, the word banshee is derived from the Irish Gaelic *bean sidhe*, meaning 'woman of the fairies'. Her mournful cry is said to foretell death. According to tradition she has long red hair and combs it, mermaid-like, as she keens outside the family home of those about to die. She is rarely heard or seen by the doomed person.

The banshee has her origins deep in Irish legend. She wailed for ancient heroes such as King Connor McNessa, Finn McCool, and the great Brian Boru, whose victory over the Vikings in 1014 broke their power in Ireland. More recently, residents of the Cork village of Sam's Cross claimed to have heard the eerie voice of the banshee when Michael Collins, commander-in-chief of the Irish Free State Army, was killed in an ambush in 1922 during the Irish Civil War.

In the late 1960s the Irish psychical researcher Sheila St Clair produced a radio

Right: 'I saw the banshee flying wild in the wind of March' – this romantic interpretation of the banshee, an illustration by Florence Harrison, dates from 1910

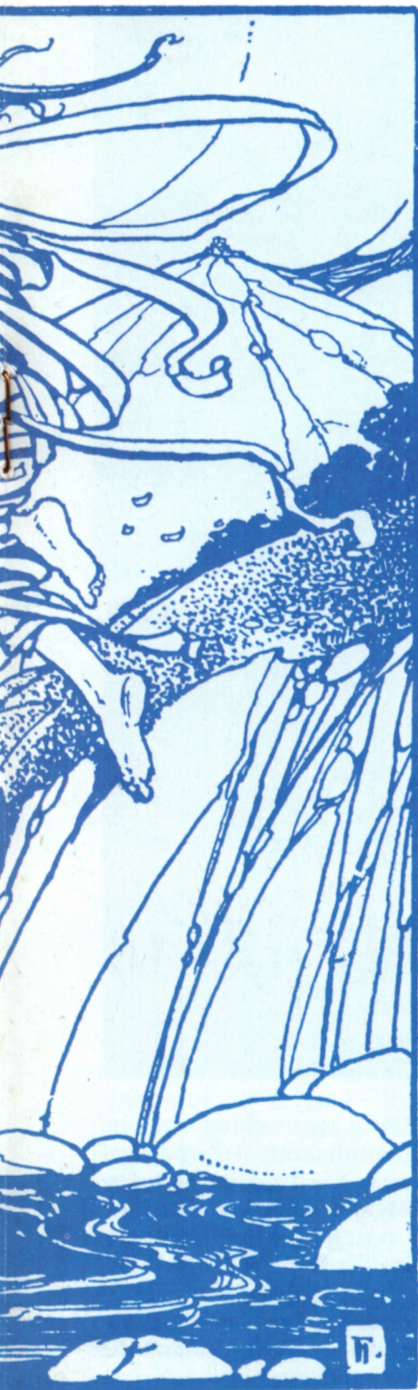


programme for the BBC on the banshee and, even allowing for Irish exaggeration, some of the accounts were chillingly convincing. A baker from Kerry told of an uncomfortable night that he and his colleagues had spent while baking bread ready for the morning delivery.

'It started low at first like, then it mounted up into a crescendo; there was definitely some human element in the voice . . . the door to the bakery where I worked was open too, and the men stopped to listen. Well, it rose as I told you to a crescendo, and you could almost make out one or two Gaelic words in it; then gradually it went away slowly. Well, we talked about it for a few minutes and at last, coming on to morning,

Top right: General Michael Collins, commander-in-chief of the Irish Free State Army, in 1922. Shortly afterwards, he was killed in an ambush at Beal-na-Blath – an event that the people of the Cork village of Sam's Cross claimed was foretold by the wailing of a banshee

Right: the funeral of John F. Kennedy. A US businessman and close friend of Kennedy heard the cry of the banshee at the time of the President's assassination



about five o'clock, one of the bread servers came in and he says to me, "I'm afraid they'll need you to take out the cart, for I just got word of the death of an aunt of mine." It was at his cart that the banshee had keened.'

On the same programme an elderly man from County Down tried to describe the death cry in more detail. 'It was a mournful sound,' he said. 'It would have put ye in mind of them ould yard cats on the wall, but it wasn't cats, I know it meself; I thought it was a bird in torment or something . . . a mournful cry it was, and then it was going a wee bit further back, and further until it died away altogether.'

Although *bean sidhe* means literally 'fairy woman' most folklorists classify the banshee as a spirit rather than a 'fairy' in the sense of one of the Irish 'little people'. According to mythology, the banshee cries at the deaths of fairy kings, too. Some of the older Irish families – the O'Briens and the O'Neils, for example – traditionally regarded the banshee almost as a personal guardian angel, silently watching over the fortunes of the family, guiding its members away from danger, and then performing the final service of 'keening' for their departing souls.

Guardian spirits

A County Antrim man told Sheila St Clair his interpretation of the banshee's role: an interpretation, incidentally, that may account for the rarity of the noisy spirit nowadays. He claimed that, centuries ago, certain of the more pious clans had been blessed with guardian spirits. Because these celestial beings were not normally able to express themselves in human terms yet became involved with the family in their charge, they were allowed to show their deep feelings only when one of their charges died: the result was the banshee howl. However, said the Antrim man, with the gradual fall from grace of the Irish over the years, only the most God-fearing families were privileged to have a personal banshee today.

This theory may please a businessman from Boston, USA, who wrote to the author of this article some years ago claiming that the



banshee, like other creatures of European folklore, had crossed the Atlantic. This man, who used the pseudonym James O'Barry, is descended from an Irish family that originally arrived in Massachusetts in 1848. It was as a very small boy that he first heard the banshee.

I was lying in bed one morning when I heard a weird noise, like a demented woman crying. It was spring, and outside the window the birds were singing, the sun was shining, and the sky was blue. I thought for a moment or two that a wind had sprung up, but a glance at the barely stirring trees told me that this was not so. I went down to breakfast and there was my father sitting at the kitchen table with tears in his eyes. I had never seen him weep before. My mother told me that they had just heard, by telephone, that my grandfather had died in New York. Although he was an old man he was as fit as a fiddle, and his death was unexpected.

It was some years before O'Barry learned the legend of the banshee, and then he recalled the wailing noise on the death of his grandfather. In 1946 he heard it, in very different circumstances, for the second time. He was an administrative officer serving with the USAAF in the Far East when one day at 6 a.m. he was awakened by a low howl. He was terrified; but, he says,

That time I was instantly aware of what it was. I sat bolt upright in bed, and the hair on the back of my neck prickled. The noise got louder, rising and falling like an air raid siren. Then it died away, and I realised that I was terribly depressed. I knew my father was dead. A



Great hauntings

few days later I had notification that this was so.

O'Barry was to hear the voice again 17 years later, on what he considers the most remarkable occasion of all. He was in Toronto, Canada, by himself, enjoying a combined holiday and business trip.

Again I was in bed, reading the morning papers, when the dreadful noise was suddenly filling my ears. I thought of my wife, my young son, my two brothers, and I thought: 'Good God, don't let it be one of them.' But for some reason I knew it wasn't.

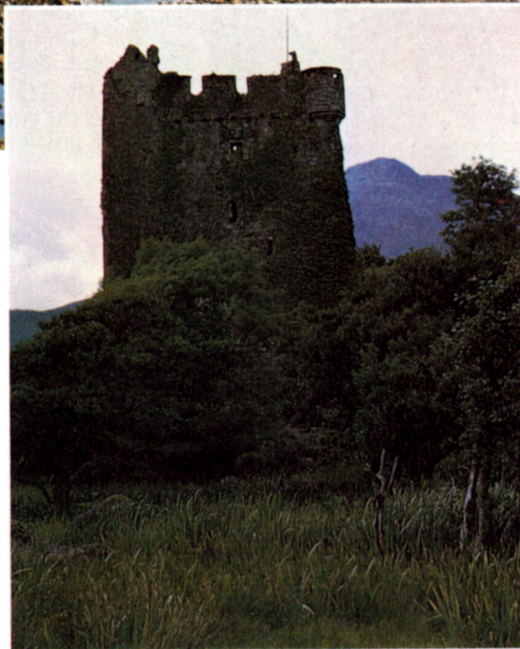
The date was 22 November 1963, the time shortly after noon, and the Irish banshee was bewailing the death of an acquaintance of O'Barry's – President John F. Kennedy.

If the Irish have their banshee, one could reasonably expect their close Celtic cousins, the Scots, to have a version of their own. It is not so, however, although most clans at some time or another have boasted a personal harbinger of death. The nearest thing to the banshee recorded in Scottish folklore is the 'death woman' who sits on westward-running streams on the west coast of Scotland, washing the clothes of those about to die, and the Highland 'red fisherman', a robed and hooded apparition who sits angling for fish. To see him is itself the warning of death.

The Ewans of the Isle of Mull, Argyllshire, preserve a curious legend concerning their own death spirit. In the 16th century Eoghan a' Chin Bhig (Ewan of the Little Head) had a serious quarrel with his father-in-law, The MacLaine. In 1538 both sides collected for a showdown. The evening



The death spirit of the Ewans of the Isle of Mull is a member of the family. In the 16th century the chieftain Eoghan (Ewan) a' Chin Bhig was given the island castle of Loch Scuaibain (above) as a wedding gift by his father, The MacLaine of Moy Castle (right). But Ewan, dissatisfied, asked his father for a better castle. A feud resulted, and Ewan was slain in battle. Ever since, the figure of Ewan, a headless horseman, has presaged death in the family

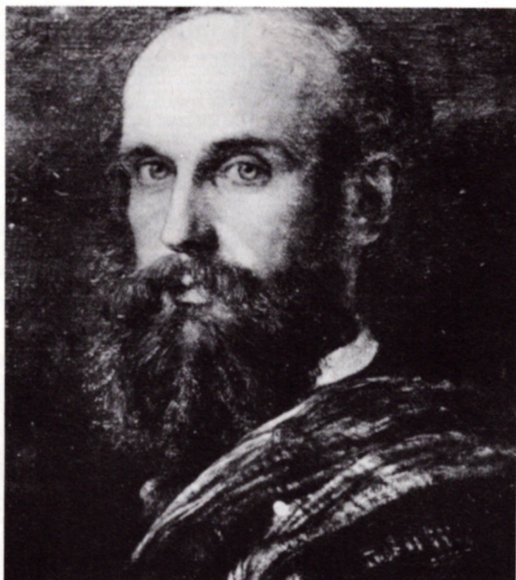


before the battle, Ewan was walking when he met an old woman washing a bundle of blood-stained shirts in a stream. Ewan knew that she was a death woman and that the shirts belonged to those who would die in the morning. Rather boldly he asked if his own shirt was among them, and she said that it was. She told him that if his wife offered him bread and cheese with her own hand he would live and be victorious.

His wife failed to do so. Ewan, demoralised, rode to defeat and at the height of the battle a swinging Lochaber axe cut his head clean from his shoulders. His horse galloped off down Glen More, the headless rider still upright in the saddle. According to the present Ewan of Lochbuie, the dead chief became his own clan's death warning, and his headless body on its galloping horse has been seen three times within living memory before a family death. The vision is also said to herald serious illness in the family.

Another celebrated Scottish death warning involves the phantom drummer of Corrachy Castle, Tayside, seat of the Earls of Airlie. One story says that he was a Leslie, come to intercede for a truce with his clan's enemies the Ogilvies – the family name of





Airlie – and that he was killed before he could deliver his message. A more romantic version is that he was a drummer with a Highland regiment and lover of a 15th-century Lady Airlie. He was caught by the Earl and thrown from a turret window.

Four well-attested accounts from the 19th century indicate that the phantom carried out its warning task efficiently. In the 1840s, the drummer was heard by members of the household before the death of the Countess of Airlie. The Earl married again shortly afterwards, and in 1848 had a house party, the guests including a Miss Margaret Dalrymple. During dinner on her first night, Miss Dalrymple remarked on the curious music she had heard coming from below her window as she dressed – the sound of a fife, followed by drumming. Both her host and hostess paled. After dinner one of the other guests explained the legend.

Ghostly drumming

The following morning Miss Dalrymple's maid, Ann Day, was alone in the bedroom attending to her mistress's clothes. She had heard nothing of the drummer story, so was surprised when she heard a coach draw up in the yard below, accompanied by the sound of drumming. When she realised that the yard was empty though the drumming carried on, she became hysterical. The following day her mistress heard the sound again, and decided she had had enough. Shortly afterwards, Lady Airlie died in Brighton, leaving a note stating that she was sure her own death had been signalled by the drumming.

In 1853 several people heard and reported the drummer again, just before the death of the Earl, and in 1881 two relatives told of hearing the prophetic sound while staying at Cortachy during Lord Airlie's absence in America. Some days later, news of his death reached them.

In the case of both the banshee and the Scottish clans' death warnings there are



Well-authenticated accounts testify to the appearance of the phantom drummer of Cortachy Castle, Tayside (above), whenever one of the Ogilvy family is about to die. Two relatives heard the ghostly drumming before the death of David Ogilvy, 10th Earl of Airlie (above left), in 1881

Far left: a banshee – 'Awful Death warning by the appearance of an Apparition' – in a 19th-century illustration

dozens of instances of people having heard or seen these harbingers of disaster. Laying aside the unlikely possibility that all of them are either lying or exaggerating, can we explain such irrational events in any rational way? Some psychologists, including Carl Jung, have evolved theories of what they term 'collective unconsciousness', a sort of inherited storehouse of memories of mankind's experiences, passed on through an atavistic process from psyche to psyche.

In the case of the banshee, Sheila St Clair says: 'I would suggest that just as we inherit physical characteristics . . . we also inherit memory cells, and that those of us with strong tribal lineages riddled with intermarriage have the banshee as part of an inherited memory. The symbolic form of a weeping woman may well be stamped on our racial consciousness. . . . And just as our other levels of consciousness are not answerable to the limitations of time in our conscious mind, so a particular part of the mind throws up a symbolic hereditary pattern that has in the past been associated with tragedy in the tribe – be it woman, hare, or bird – as a kind of subliminal "four minute warning" so that we may prepare ourselves for that tragedy.'

Ufologists have noted close parallels between the devils that, in the medieval period, were believed to be real, and modern UFOs. But, asks HILARY EVANS, does this really mean that UFOs are essentially evil?

ON 18 MARCH 1978 Bill Herrmann, a 30-year-old truck driver of Charleston, South Carolina, was watching a 'slick metal disc, about sixty feet [20 metres] in diameter', as it manoeuvred in the sky near his home. Abruptly, it dropped towards him: 'Suddenly it was right in front of me. I fell backward. The next thing I knew, there was light all around me, green and blue, and I felt myself being tugged upward.'

In what seemed to him only a moment, Herrmann found himself sitting miles away in an open field, in a diminishing circle of orange light, as the spacecraft skittered away in a triangular flight pattern that, he was told later, was designed to avoid damage from Earth radar sources. 'I couldn't remember anything. I didn't know where I was. A terrible fear came over me, and I stood there weeping for what seemed a long time. I felt dirty. I felt like . . . I can't describe it. I felt like I had been around something I shouldn't

Below: demons torture their victims in hell, in a 16th-century illustration from a French manuscript. UFO expert Jacques Vallée has pointed out the similarity between some medieval accounts of demonic torture and the 'medical examinations' that many victims of close encounters of the third kind allege they are forced by their kidnappers to undergo. Other ufologists have been quick to name the power they believe inspires such events: the fallen angel Satan



Heralds of the Antichrist?



have been around.'

Later, under hypnosis, Herrmann recalled an examining table, flashing lights, and creatures resembling human foetuses, with over-large heads and eyes, spongy white skin, and wearing rust-coloured jumpsuits. They were about 4½ feet (150 centimetres) high. For Herrmann, there was no question but that his experience was a 'Satanic delusion'. Since then, whenever he sees a UFO – and he has had several more encounters – he renounces it in God's name. This apparently works very effectively.

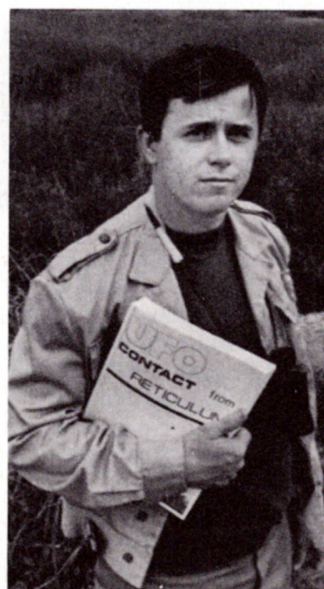
It is important to note that Herrmann is a fundamentalist Baptist by persuasion. Clearly his experiences are in some way related to his beliefs; what is less clear is whether his beliefs caused his experience, or whether they simply caused him to interpret it in a particular way. As a matter of historical fact, the majority of UFO reports have come from countries with a Christian culture, so it is not surprising that most metaphysical explanations for them have a Christian slant and set the UFO in a Christian context.

There is, of course, no rigid Christian dogma in UFO matters; but a concept that has been held by many Christians, from the foundation of their religion, is that of an Antichrist. Briefly, the Antichrist is a false Messiah, the exact opposite of Jesus, possessing many of his miraculous powers and offering – or seeming to offer – many of the same benefits. In fact, the origins of the idea



Left: the begetting of the Antichrist, with attendant demons, from a 15th-century woodcut. The existence of the Antichrist – a figure opposite to Christ in every respect – was widely believed in from the early medieval period onwards. Is it merely an echo of this ancient belief that causes some modern ufologists to believe that the Antichrist is behind the UFO phenomenon?

Below: Bill Herrmann, a truck driver from South Carolina, USA, who experienced a terrifying close encounter of the third kind in March 1978. His conclusion was that he had been the victim of a 'Satanic delusion'



of such a being antedate Christianity by many centuries: the notion is simply a personification of the dualism of good and evil that seems to have been one of Man's conceptions since he became capable of thinking.

Over the centuries a tradition has gradually been formulated that the Antichrist is destined to enjoy a temporary success, gaining control of Earth for a short while before a final conflict in which – it is confidently predicted – he will be worsted by Christ, who will then take over the reins of world government and inaugurate a golden age of everlasting peace. If we mere Earthlings know this, then presumably the omniscient Antichrist must know it too, but the prospect of inevitable defeat does not seem to deter him.

Certainly the demonic theorists have no doubt of his determination to continue the struggle, and in the turbulence of the present age with its violence, its sexual permissiveness, its decline of faith, they see indications that the coming of Antichrist is at hand: and the UFOs are the tangible signs that herald that coming. Two American theorists who take this view literally are John Weldon and Zola Levitt. In their book *UFOs – what on Earth is happening?*, published in 1975, they state:

UFOs are a manifestation of demon activity. They are here to misguide the multitudes and they are doing pretty well. They have judiciously utilised their powers through selected people to fascinate the masses, and they have widely promulgated their doctrines. They do not march through Times Square, of course, because this would reveal too much of the spiritual world.

This might make people reconsider, as well, the existence of God, and the nether forces would have advertised for their enemy.

Just how 'real' are the UFOs – solid objects or subtle delusions?

Are the flying machines really up there? Maybe so; it's not that important. If the demons wish them to be there, they are there, and if they wish people to imagine they're there, then they are imagined to be there.

But there is no such ambiguity about the demons who pilot them:

Are they just ideas of ours? No, not the way the Bible characterises them. They have motives and they take action. We are by no means making them happen or just dreaming up their activities. We believe demons can induce a whole series of experiences that, in fact, never really happened, similar to the experiences Uri Geller and Dr Puharich found were induced by their extraterrestrial contacts [see page 621]. They can also, however, through various means produce 'real' UFOs which are visible to anyone. With the powers we know demons have, they could theoretically transform a large chunk of rock into a UFO, assume human form inside of it, and land openly, thus 'proving' the existence of advanced intergalactic civilisations.

However, the authors doubt if this is often done: 'more likely, the standard UFO sighting is either a projection into our atmosphere, or the self-transformation of whatever material the demons themselves are composed of.' As for their purpose, there is no doubt about that:

Quite simply, we think the demons are preparing the coming of the Antichrist. The Antichrist is not your run-of-the-mill world dictator. He is, in fact, something we have never contended with before; a political leader of great acumen – virtually a sorcerer, engaging and appealing – a kind of inverse Messiah.

In what way do the UFOs herald the Antichrist? They are a form of cultural conditioning. 'To properly set the stage for the Antichrist, who really is a supernatural personality, the world has to be made ready to think in terms of the new and the strange. Here's where we think the UFOs come in.'

Dan Lloyd is another demonist who does not underestimate the cunning of his enemy. No less than the fundamentalist Christians, Lloyd contemplates with misgivings the UFO-inspired cult followers who look towards 'benign visitors from outer space, visitors who will one day land on Earth and take over the reins from a humanity gone sadly astray and unable to solve its global problems'. He asks, 'Could it be that Antichrist will manifest in a guise that will fulfill



all the expectations of these sky watchers with their distorted religious longings?’

Lloyd quotes with approval the theory put forward by the eminent French ufologist Jacques Vallée in his ‘control-system’ hypothesis:

I believe there is a system around us that transcends time as it transcends space. The system may well be able to locate itself in outer space, but its manifestations are not spacecraft in the ordinary ‘nuts and bolts’ sense. The UFOs are physical manifestations that cannot be understood apart from their psychic and symbolic reality. What we see in effect here is not an alien invasion. It is a control system which acts on humans and uses humans.

What evidence does Vallée have for such a system? He points to the continuity of reported happenings, which show that today’s UFO reports are only yesterday’s folklore in an updated form. One of the cases he cites is the alleged abduction of Barney and Betty Hill:

While she was in the craft, Betty was submitted to a simulated medical test. Under hypnosis, she reported that a long needle was inserted into her navel, that she felt pain, and that the pain stopped when the leader made a certain

Above: a detail from a 14th-century interpretation of the events described in the book of Revelation. Among these is a struggle between the forces of good and evil. Believers in the demonic origin of UFOs see the powers behind the UFO phenomenon as the latest contenders in the age-old battle between good and evil

gesture. . . . A fifteenth-century French calendar, the *Kalendrier des bergiers*, shows the tortures inflicted by demons on the people they have taken: the demons are depicted piercing their victims’ abdomens with long needles.

To explain such parallels, Vallée claims, they must be seen as part of a larger pattern; and that pattern implies a pattern-maker. But who that pattern-maker may be, who is operating the control-system, and for what purpose, Vallée cannot or will not say.

But many of those who, like Dan Lloyd, believe in supernatural beings of one sort or another, do not share Vallée’s hesitation:

Vallée is unable to point a finger at the group in question, but it should not be difficult for Anthroposophists to be alert to the fact that behind whatever human group may be active in this area, there hovers the invisible presence of the Being who acts as their inspirer . . . the cosmic being who has been known since ancient Persian times as Ahri-man. In the Bible he is known as Satan.

Like Weldon and Levitt, Lloyd credits the Ahrimanic beings with the capability to create UFOs to serve their purposes:

It is not from some hypothetical ‘fourth dimension’ that what we call UFOs are manifesting. It would be truer to say that they are deliberately distorted etheric effects, and it should surprise no one to learn that such effects can influence physical matter and create, in turn, physical effects.

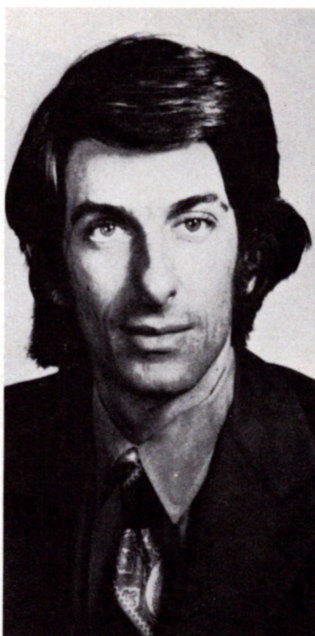
Everlasting conflict



Another group that welcomes UFOs as grist to its mill is that of the occultists – though perhaps ‘welcome’ is an inappropriate word, for occultists, too, see them as a menace to be taken very seriously. Anthony Roberts and Geoff Gilbertson see UFOs as the latest manifestation of a centuries-old conspiracy of evil forces – gods, demons, spirits, fairies – who seek to manipulate human credulity for their own ends:

The reason this activity is today manifesting itself in such a strictly scientific manner (spacecraft, men in silver suits, green aliens, weird technological gadgetry, and so on) is simply that this is a highly technological age and the phenomenon has merely adjusted accordingly. It knows how to put up a good front.

The authors cite a number of cases in which, they suggest, ‘the observant reader will notice some darker ambiguities hovering round them’. Ambiguities certainly hovered round the first case they quote, the west Wales sighting of 1977 (see page 810), though not perhaps of the kind that Roberts and Gilbertson had in mind; nor is their final case very convincing. Roberts describes how he was driving along the Kingston bypass, outside London, one evening, when both his wife and he saw an object variously described as ‘huge’ and as ‘the size of a very large grapefruit’ – does he mean the size of a grapefruit held at arm’s length? This so impressed them that they stopped and watched it for 20 minutes as it manoeuvred above



Above: Jacques Vallée, a ufologist who has pointed out the parallels between UFOs and the ancient belief in devils. Vallée himself does not go as far as to conclude that UFOs are demonic in origin – but a number of ufologists have been less cautious

If a good God created everything in the world, how can evil have come into being? This has been one of the besetting problems for theologians of all religions for thousands of years. There have been many suggested solutions; most involve the dualistic notion of the opposition of the two independent powers of good and evil, God and the Devil – as exemplified in this medieval illustration of the kingdoms of heaven and hell (left).

One of the most extreme – and the most influential – forms of dualism was the doctrine preached by a third-century Babylonian prince named Mani, which spread to the West through heretical Christian sects like the Cathars. Mani claimed that an angel had revealed to him that the world was governed by two spirits, one good and one evil. Man was created by the evil spirit – but God, the good spirit, has given us the knowledge of good and the power, if we wish, to attain it. Thus the world is in constant conflict, with the forces of good and evil continually trying to enlist the support of mankind – all in all, a state of affairs that seems strangely close to what the demonic ufologists believe to be the case.

them. Now, they were there and we were not; nevertheless, anyone familiar with the traffic conditions on the Kingston bypass must be sceptical of an account that involves a car pulling to the side of that very busy road, and an astonishing aerial display overhead lasting 20 minutes, apparently seen by no one else.

Alien monster?

It remains the case that UFO experiences are undoubtedly a matter of sober fact, whatever their interpretation. There is certainly a case to be answered. But when so improbable a hypothesis as a cosmic conspiracy is being put forward, the evidence needs to be of the very best. The case of Albert Bender, allegedly visited by three men in black, is another instance of the conspiracy that Robert and Gilbertson claim to have unearthed; but, as *The Unexplained* has already shown (see page 510), the Bender case is, to put it kindly, dubious. Nor is ‘the observant reader’ likely to accept readily the authors’ version of the Loch Ness mystery: seemingly ready to detect sinister forces in every anomalous phenomenon, they endorse the dramatic adventure of American contactee Ted Owens who claims he acts as an Earth-based agent for the Space Intelligences:

They sent me on a mission and Loch Ness was one of the places I was to visit. It was the dark of night, just after midnight, when I stood on the shores of the lake. That’s when the monster came up out of the depths and surfaced. . . . It stared at me and in the moonlight I could see a long neck, about eight inches [20 centimetres] in diameter, and a small head. I communicated with the creature. It is from another dimension and has a link with the Space Intelligences.

In the course of their thesis, Roberts and Gilbertson point the finger at any number of forces who, they imply, are either servants of or unwitting agents for the Dark Gods. The CIA, the Mafia, the KGB, the Theosophists and the magicians, the House of Rothschild and the Rosicrucians – all are playing their part in a conspiracy of which the UFOs are merely the outward sign. When they add ‘and can we not add the MIB [men in black] for good measure?’ the reader may begin to suspect it’s all a gigantic spoof. Unfortunately, the authors show not a glimmer of a sense of humour. It seems they are in deadly earnest when they speak of ‘a cosmic battleground’ where there is to be fought a battle between forces that are (here they quote the American author H. P. Lovecraft) ‘coterminous with all space and coexistent with all time’. But this is rather more than most human imaginations are able to cope with; and for most demonists, the cosmic war is a much more here-and-now affair.

Are the controllers of UFOs engaged in a battle for men’s souls? See page 1366

Stories of people who ‘disappear into thin air’ abound – but disappointingly the facts do not often bear close scrutiny. PAUL BEGG re-examines some of the classic cases

IN 1872 THE *Mary Celeste* was found aimlessly wandering in the Atlantic. She was in remarkably good condition and well-provisioned, but her crew had apparently abandoned ship. Since no experienced sailor is ever likely to desert a seaworthy ship for a comparatively dangerous lifeboat unless his life is in severe danger, the disappearance of *Mary Celeste*’s crew is an outstanding mystery (see page 950). Over the years, however, it has been made even more mysterious by the addition of fictional details such as half-eaten breakfasts being found on the galley table and the aroma of fresh tobacco smoke lingering in the captain’s cabin.

Such additions come into being for many reasons: to add to the eeriness of a story for entertainment value, for example, or, less innocently, with the deliberate intention of introducing supernatural overtones to a mystery that would otherwise be confined within the comparatively boring limitations of the natural and the known. Another much-publicised case is that of the disappearance in 1809 of the British diplomat Benjamin Bathurst (see page 281).

The Bathurst disappearance is a complex and, indeed, an impenetrable mystery yet, perhaps significantly, it is rarely expanded beyond a single, simple, and mystery-making paragraph that generally goes along the lines of: Benjamin Bathurst was about to board a coach outside an inn in (or near)



Disappearing disappearances

Berlin. He was seen to walk around the heads of the horses – and was never seen again.

The disappearance of Bathurst is far too complex to describe here in anything but the broadest outline, but it is sufficient to say that in 1809 the British government sent him on a secret mission to the Court of Austria. Earlier in the year the Austrians had suffered a demoralising defeat at the hands of Napoleon and it is generally accepted that Bathurst’s mission was to dissuade Emperor Francis II from total capitulation.

Bathurst was returning from this mission with a companion when he stopped at an inn in Perleberg, a day’s journey from Hamburg, where a ship was waiting to return him to England. He stayed at the inn for a few hours and at 9 p.m. he told his companion that he was going to have the horses made ready for the continuation of the journey. What happened next is disputed. According to the memoirs of his father, Bishop Bathurst, published in 1837, it was an hour before the

One of the most frequently told ‘mysterious disappearance’ stories is that of the British diplomat Benjamin Bathurst (above), who walked round the heads of his coach horses in the German town of Perleberg (right) in 1809 – and vanished, never to be seen again. His disappearance, however, seems less mysterious when it is known that he was on a top secret political mission at the time

companion grew alarmed by Bathurst’s continued absence and made enquiries, learning that Bathurst was about to climb into his coach when something in the shadows of the entrance to the inn courtyard caught his attention and apparently compelled him to investigate. He walked into the darkness and was never seen again.

So it is most certainly a mystery, but there was almost certainly no supernatural element to the Bathurst story. Nobody actually saw Bathurst disappear into thin air. He did *not* simply walk around the heads of his horses and step off the face of the Earth. It should be remembered that Bathurst was in a precarious political position: Napoleon would have been interested in the outcome of Bathurst’s discussion with Francis II, and Bathurst had made enemies at the Emperor’s court who may not have wished to see a renewal of hostilities between Austria and France. Besides, there were rogues and vagabonds in Perleberg itself who would have

killed Bathurst for no more than the clothes he wore. Bathurst could have met his end at the hands of any one of these. Yet the fact remains that his body was never found.

The exciting story of the 'lost colony' is another mystery that some unscrupulous authors have made more mysterious than it ever was, although this time they have done it by omitting certain details. The tale has several versions, a typical account being that given in Michael Harrison's *Vanishings*.

According to Harrison: in 1585 Sir Walter Raleigh established a settlement on Roanoke Island off the coast of present-day North Carolina. Harrison says that Raleigh left the colonists and

returned to England for needed supplies and a reinforcement of emigrants. The date of the settlement was 1585. When Raleigh returned to Roanoke, he found no trace of the settlers; all had gone. . . . The rationalists say that, despairing of their ever seeing Raleigh again, the settlers trekked over the mainland until they were either captured by, or voluntarily made common cause with, the Mandan Indians.

Almost everything Harrison has written about the disappearance of the Roanoke settlement is wrong. Raleigh organised and part-financed the settlement, but he never visited Roanoke personally. The colony that disappeared did so in or after 1587, not 1585, and the man who returned to England for supplies was not Raleigh but one John White. He was prevented from returning to the New World for the next three years, during which time the colonists are not known to have seen another European face. From these facts alone it is not too difficult to deduce a reasonable explanation for the disappearance of the colony.

In an effort to dismiss contrary and often more prosaic solutions to these 'mysteries',



Top: Michael Harrison, author of *Vanishings* (1981) which repeats many of the popular tales of people who allegedly disappear under 'mysterious' circumstances

Above: Sir Walter Raleigh (1554–1618) who, in 1585 – according to Harrison – established a settlement on Roanoke Island, off the coast of North Carolina. Harrison says that Raleigh returned to discover that the colonists had vanished. Yet the fact is that Raleigh never visited the settlement personally



sensationalist authors employ a variety of writing techniques designed to persuade the reader that the unlikely explanation is in fact the more reasonable one. Harrison uses one of these ploys when he refers to the theory that the colonists were absorbed by the Mandan Indians. He is clearly contemptuous of those whom he calls 'rationalists', implying that the *only* rational solution ever offered is the Mandan theory. Presumably the reader is intended to conclude that this is a desperately contrived idea evoked by people who refuse even to consider a more sinister, but reasonable, solution.

The Mandan solution

In fact, rationalists would be among the first to dismiss the Mandan solution as absurd; it is highly improbable that the colonists would have attempted, let alone survived, a crossing from the Outer Banks of North Carolina to the Mandan Indians of Missouri. Moreover, it is doubtful that the Mandan solution was proposed by historians since they have had a fairly good idea of the colonists' fate for over 400 years.

Before John White left Roanoke he arranged that if the colonists abandoned the settlement they should carve the name of their destination on a stockade post and append a cross if the move was made under duress or in distress. To quote White's own words: 'one of the chiefe trees of postes at the right side of the entrance had the barke taken off, and 5 foote [1.5 metres] from the ground in fayre Capitall letters was graven CROATOAN without any crosse or signe of distresse.'

Yet much mystery has been made of this. In his *Strange people* (1966) Frank Edwards writes: 'It is possible that the word meant little or nothing to the Englishmen who found it. Or if they did recognise it as a clue to the missing colonists, perhaps they realised that they dared not follow the clue to its conclusion.' All very mystery-making – and all very untrue. White had stated quite plainly: 'I greatly joyed that I had safely found a certaine token of their safe being at Croatoan, which is the place where Manteo was borne, and the savages of the Iland our friends.'

White's joy was short-lived. He was prevented from going to Croatoan and was never able to verify that this was where the colonists went, but it is a fair conclusion that without food, surrounded on all sides by hostile Indians, and cut off from home in a new, unexplored, and equally hostile country, the settlers would have sought refuge in the one place where they were assured of friendship – Croatoan. Sad to relate, there is some evidence that suggests that the Indians of Croatoan were later massacred by the Indians of the powerful Powhatan Confederacy of the Algonkian tribes in the Virginia Tidewater.

The Roanoke disappearance *is* a mystery,

Disappearances

but only insofar as there is no absolute proof of the colonists' fate and not because of any suggestion that their disappearance was in even the slightest way paranormal or supernatural.

Another example of the 'manufactured mystery' is the case of the missing Norfolks (see page 590), a battalion of British soldiers who disappeared at Gallipoli in 1915 and whose fate remains unknown to this day – a mystery that considerably pales in significance when one takes into account the fact that 27,000 British and Empire troops died at Gallipoli and have no known grave. However, the story has become particularly popular in books about 'mysterious' disappearances and UFOs because a soldier named Reichardt claimed to have witnessed their fate. He says they were abducted by a cloud.

Delayed reaction

Most accounts of the Norfolk disappearance omit to mention that Reichardt told his story 50 years after the event at an old comrades' reunion – events that are not noted as particularly sober affairs – and that it contains many details that are either wrong or inconsistent with the circumstances of the genuine disappearance. Examined in the light of thoroughly documented facts, it is almost certain that Reichardt confused two separate incidents.

In recent years writers such as Lawrence Kusche, Ronald Story and Philip Klass have conducted thorough research into many fields of the unexplained and on the basis of well-researched, and fully documented, evidence have concluded that many stories such as that of the Norfolks are not supported by the facts. Of course, these conclusions do not have to be accepted, but they should not be dismissed without reason. Some authors, however, for reasons best known to themselves, refuse to accept that certain stories have been demonstrated to be untrue and they continue to repeat these tales without providing a scrap of evidence to support their reasons for having done so. It might be thought that such authors intend deliberately to mislead their readers.

In this respect, two books are noteworthy for the retelling of tales long since discredited: Charles Berlitz's *Without a trace* (1978) and Michael Harrison's *Vanishings* (1981). Charles Berlitz, for instance, repeats once more the story of the *Freya* as a Bermuda Triangle fatality, long after it had been established that the incident took place in the Pacific; and Michael Harrison, while claiming to have read most, if not all, of the books that expose so many of these tales, nevertheless presents them again as if such evidence did not exist, or could safely be ignored.

For example, Harrison dismisses the errors in Reichardt's story about the disappearing Norfolks as 'unimportant' – which they most certainly were not – and makes the



Above: a drawing of the Indian settlement Secoton by John White, the English colonist who discovered the message left by the 'missing' settlers. They quite clearly stated that they were intending to make for the village of Croatoan – yet curiously many popular accounts of the settlers' subsequent disappearance make no mention of this

Above right: a North American Indian, as painted by one of the first European settlers. The Indians at Croatoan were known to be friendly to the Roanoke settlers, but shortly after the Europeans are assumed to have arrived at Croatoan it was overrun by a hostile tribe – and there were few survivors

remarkable statement that Reichardt's story was received by 'sceptics baying for "the facts"'. It seems he expects fantastic tales to be accepted without an ounce of corroborative evidence.

The paranormal attracts frauds, cranks, and hoaxers, and it is never easy to distinguish between serious books about the paranormal and those that are sensationalist. A good rule of thumb guide is to check whether the author begins by appealing to his readers not to have a closed mind.

In the introduction to her book *They dared the Devil's Triangle*, Adi-Kent Thomas Jeffrey almost fanatically implores her readers:

... let us lift our faces to the winds of mystery and not cover our senses with the impenetrable armour of suspicion and skepticism. ... Let us not don the thick-helmet of closed-mindedness under the guise of so-called 'common sense' or 'reason'.

And in the foreword to *Vanishings* Michael Harrison similarly warns his readers against 'contemptuous scoffers' and 'authors charitably inclined to reassure the uneasy'.

But facts speak for themselves. The author of a well-researched and fully documented book has no need so to implore his readers. But the absence of facts is, of course, the essential weakness of writers who seek only to amaze and astound, and what sensationalist writers want of you, apart from your money, is your faith in what they write.

Did David Lang really disappear into thin air in front of his family? See page 1378

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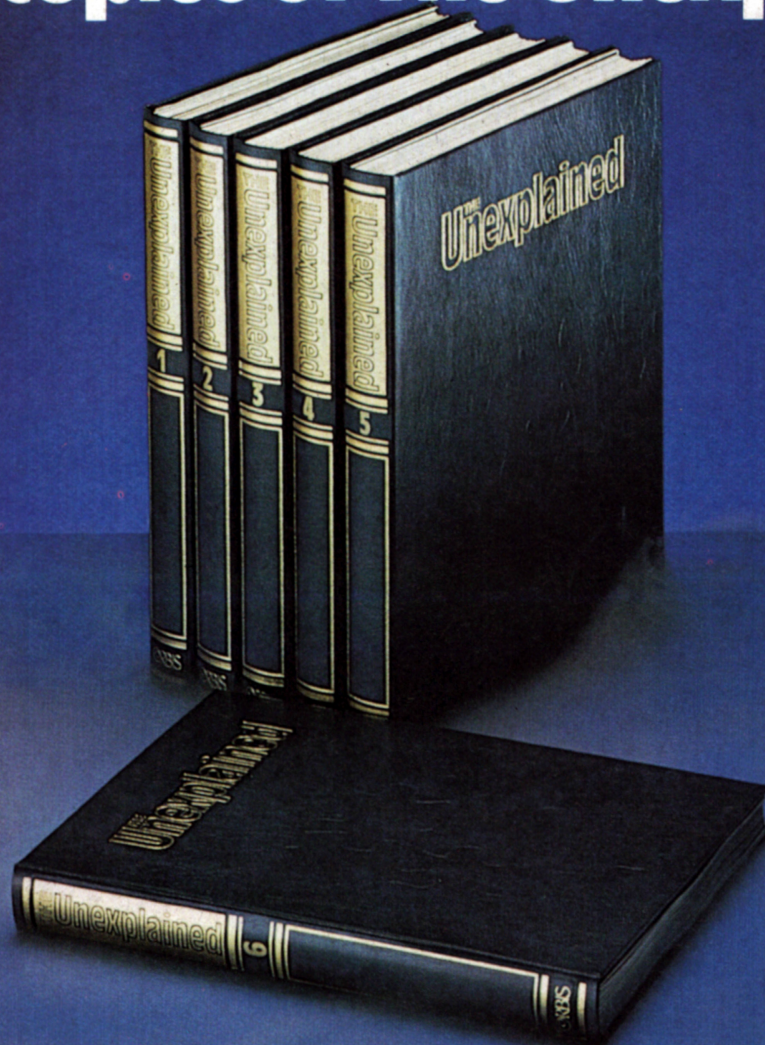
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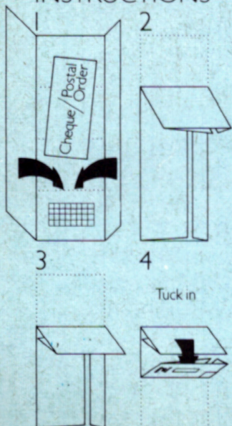


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